

BOOKREVIEW

MINISTRY FORMATION

Book Review - March 2010

A Review of *Vintage Church - Timeless Truths and Timely Methods*

by Mark Driscoll & Gerry Breshears (Wheaton Illinois: Crossway Books: 2008)

by Jack De Vries

There is a lot of value in vintage items. Just go to any Classic Auction, as I did in a recent trip to Melbourne. Items might be 100 years old, but they bring in huge bids. The gentleman who sat on my right purchased two Victorian Numerical Licence Plates; the winning bid: \$58,000. The vintage 1952 Jaguar XK120 pictured below sold at \$103,000. Besides a number of vintage

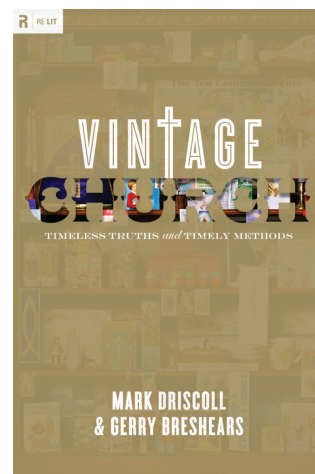


motorcycles, my favourite vehicle was a 1967 Chevrolet Camaro RS Coupe; it sold at \$65,500. The elderly lady on my left could not believe people would buy stuff she would dispose of at the tip, such as a large plastic BP sign which sold for \$550. But that is the nature of things vintage; they have value!

Motorcycles, Camaros, and plastic BP signs are not the only things classified as vintage; churches also have vintage value. At least, that is the point that co-authors Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears make in their book: *Vintage Church*. The book lives up to its subtitle, *Timeless Truths and Timely Methods*.

This book, *Vintage Church* co-authored by Mark Driscoll is vintage Driscoll. It is remarkably comprehensive. Driscoll admits in this book that any sermon under an hour is a short sermon; this is not a “short” book. Over the course of roughly 300 pages Driscoll and Breshears touch on an incredibly wide range of topics related to church life and leadership. The book begins in classic Driscoll style – with Jesus. The gospel remains upfront and in focus. After explaining what the Christian life is all about, the authors go to tackle topics in catechetical style, answering questions such as: what is a Christian Church, why is preaching important, what are baptism and communion, what is church discipline, what is a missional church, and so on. This wide range of topics could easily lend this book to be used as a primer in a college course on the nature of the church.

This book arises out of the context of the local church. In each chapter both Mark and Gerry share about ministry lessons they have gleaned in the throes of serving as the primary preaching pastor at Mars Hill Church in Seattle and as unpaid pastor-elder on the preaching team at Grace Community Church in Gresham, Oregon, respectively. There is thorough biblical support for the advice the authors give, all duly footnoted. It is obvious that the authors have a deep love for the church and they want to see the church honour Jesus by being a positive influence in the world. Hence *Vintage Church* is a helpful blend of Biblical



teaching and practical wisdom. Personally I appreciated the number of quotes rooted in the ancient creeds and confessions of the church, along with the many references to the spiritual giants of the past. The authors take some of the timeless truths of the past and package it in a way that makes sense for the current challenges faced by the church of today.

Some of the best chapters in the book were the chapters on preaching, church unity, church discipline, and the mission of the church. The chapter on preaching alone is worth the price of the book. Church leaders interested in training up and coming preachers would benefit by assigning this chapter. It covers a lot of homiletical turf.

The chapter on church unity is inspiring. The point is made that “to continually pursue unity a church must continually pursue change” (147). This is truth every church and/or denomination needs to heed. The chapter on church discipline is a prophetic word for our day. As the authors lament: “Church discipline is one of the most misunderstood and yet most desperately needed ministries within the church”(170). The authors do not hold back any punches in this chapter. They not only stress the importance of true repentance, but emphasize the biblical message of restorative, loving church discipline.

For any church desiring to be relevant and reach the lost for Christ, chapter nine, *What is a Missional Church*, is gold. Not only do we see the Driscoll and Breshears’ passion, but

this chapter is a thorough and honest overview of what it means to be missional. With the glut of books written on this subject, this chapter serves not only as a good summary, but a helpful critique of the missional movement.

Anyone familiar with Driscoll’s speaking and writing is aware that much of what he communicates is black and white; most of his positions are rigid, and it comes across as “like it or lump it.” This might work well in a local church setting and Driscoll intimates in the chapter on church unity that this is critical for



This 1950 Ariel Square 4 Motorcycle was my bike of choice at the Classic Auction. It sold for \$16,000 – not a bad price for an “old” (sorry - vintage) bike!

the church: “...the key is to have agreement in the church about how things are done, such as baptism, Communion, service order, church building furnishings, preaching format, worship music, discipleship, and evangelism....There must be organizational unity around how things are done in the church”(139,140).

But this rigidity frustrates me when I consider the variety of expressions of the church universal. I have served traditional and more progressive churches. Some were well established; another I planted. Each had its uniqueness and challenges. There is not one glove that fits all hands, nor one Biblical emphasis which trumps all the rest. For example, when some read Driscoll and Breshears’ understanding of the role of women in the church they might say, “Yea and amen.” But they might take issue with their explanation of the right mode and understanding of water baptism. Or visa versa. The authors suggest that their Biblical interpretations are definitive. But there are many who will take issue with their

conclusions on one or more issue. Regarding baptism they write: “We simply cannot understand how evangelicals who rightly believe that justification and regeneration are by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone can hold this understanding of baptism [infant baptism, SIC] and not see baptism as appropriate for believers only”(116). From my theological vantage point, I make the exact opposite conclusion. I cannot understand how theologically sharp preachers who hold to a Reformed understanding of by grace alone through faith alone dismiss infant baptism. For me this is the most true expression of God’s grace; it reaches to us long before we are able to make even the slightest response – from infancy on.

These comments ought not hinder anyone from picking up this book and digesting it from cover to cover. This is an excellent overview of the church – a vintage all of its own. Church staff members, students, pastors, elders, volunteers, deacons, others in church leadership positions, and just about anybody else in the church will find this book as a great resource. But like any book, read it with a critical mind and a discerning spirit. Don’t pick it apart, but allow it to challenge preconceived ideas you might have about the church: what it is, and what it is not, and what your place in it might be.

Some years down the passage of time, our children or grandchildren might find a copy of this book on some used book shelf. A vintage copy of a classic book on the church! They might pick it up for a song, but the truths found in it are timeless, and the methods timely. A good find then and now!

About the authors:



MARK DRISCOLL is a founding pastor and the lead preaching pastor of Mars Hill Church in Seattle, one of the fastest-growing churches in America. He is president of the Acts 29 Church Planting Network and

leads the Resurgence Missional Theology Cooperative.



GERRY BRESHEARS is professor of theology and chairman of the division of biblical and theological studies at Western Seminary. He and Driscoll also coauthored *Vintage Jesus* and *Death by Love*, also part of the

Re:Lit:Vintage Jesus series.